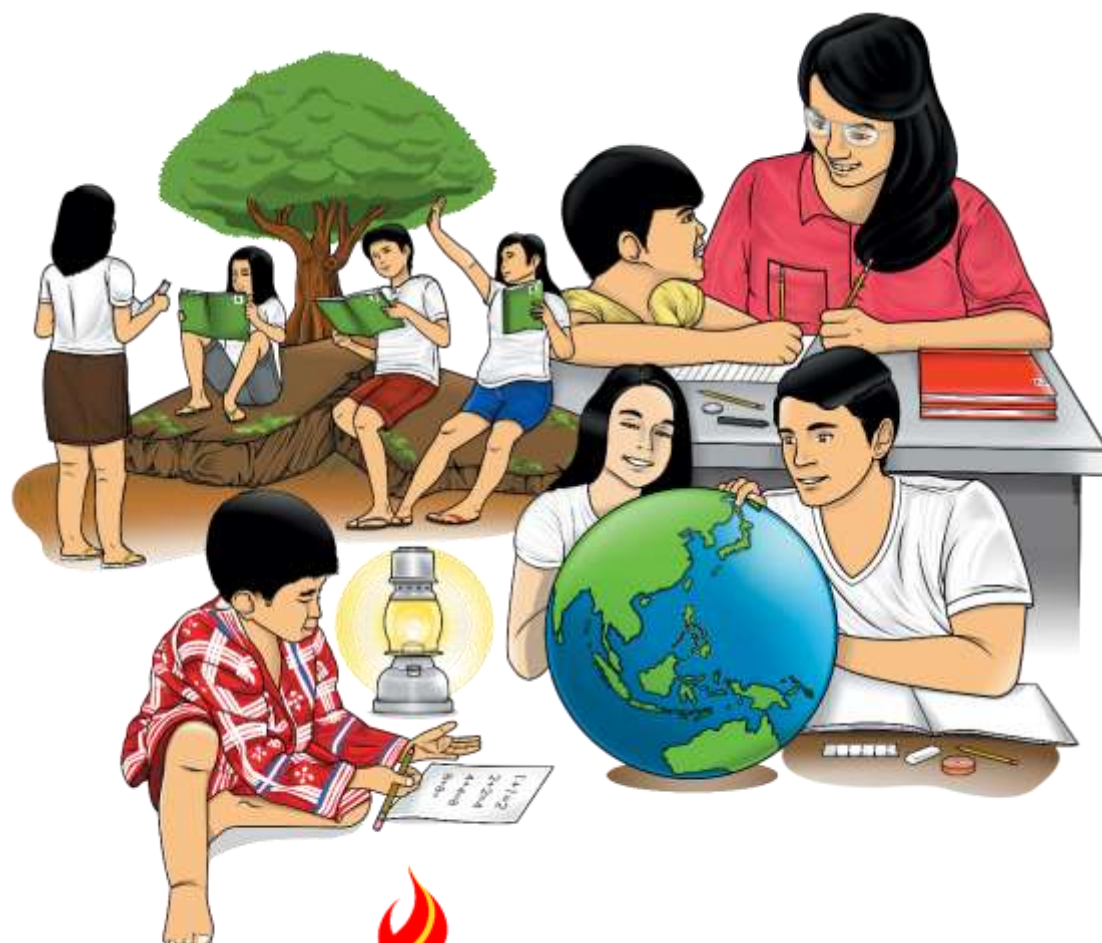


Understanding Culture Society and Politics

Quarter 2 – Module 3: Concept, Characteristics and Forms of Stratification Systems



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What is It

In this part of your journey, we provided something for you to read to deepen your understanding about the topic.

Please read with comprehension to discover knowledge that will help you out in dealing with the next phase of your quest.

Concept of Social Stratification

Have you ever wondered why people don't have the same status in life when they were born? Why are there rich and poor people in the society? Have you ever thought this idea wondering what if you were born rich? On the other hand, what if you were born poor? What if the society is some kind of Utopia where everything is just perfect and equal?

Yet, whatever social class one belongs to in a society, it is hope that one may find reasons to still be grateful and live a life that is full of opportunities.

The idea of rich and the poor may be too familiar to everyone. It can be seen in Pinoy teleseryes or Korean dramas that you watched back then, and it can be seen in reality just like in the society where you are belong. The activities that you encountered a while ago introduced you to the new lesson which is about categorizing individuals or group of people based on factors such as power, wealth, and prestige. This is called **Social Classes** and the layering of these social classes from higher to lower class is called **Social Stratification**. Social stratification is defined as *the hierarchical arrangement and establishment of social categories that may evolve into social groups together with statuses and their corresponding roles in the society* (Cordero-McDonald, et al., 1995, 380). Let's take a look on the pyramid of social classes shown below:

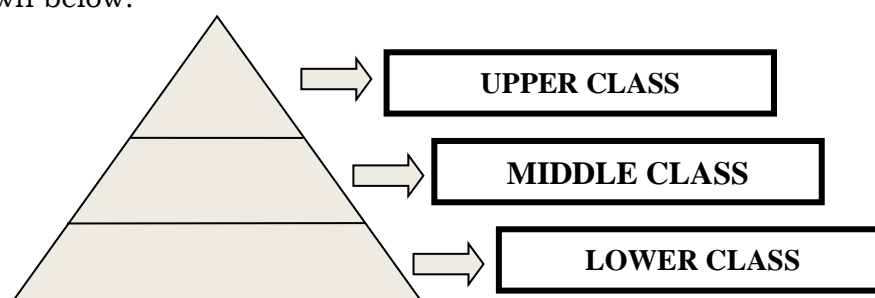


Figure 1. Pyramid of Social Classes or Social Stratification

Social stratification is divided into **three social classes**. At the top of the pyramid is where the **Upper Class**. This class in the society is described by the sociologists as elite individuals or group of people that are most prolific and successful in their respective areas. These people may be **stockholders** and **investors** in very huge well-known companies from different industries here and abroad. In the second activity earlier, **Henry Sy, Sr.** and **Lucio Tan, Sr.** are both considered elite who belong to the upper class of social stratification. According to the "List of 50 richest Filipinos in 2014" of Pinoy Money Talk website (as cited by Lanuza and Raymundo 2016, 109), Henry Sy, Sr. and his family had a net worth of

\$12.7 billion, while Lucio Tan, Sr. and his family had a net worth of \$6.1 billion. These people may own big companies and huge mansions here and abroad, mingle with the same class, own fancy cars, and value wealthy heritage.

Dividing the upper class and lower class is the **Middle Class**. Middle class are mostly professional individuals or groups of people like **lawyers, doctors, managers, owners of small businesses in the locality**, and **executives who work in the corporate world**, etc. They are able to meet both their needs and wants without even worrying about their finances because of the job and salary they have. They live in spacious houses and situated in best suburbs. Their income can afford them a comfortable lifestyle. They value education the most since education to them is the most important measure of social status.

Last but not the least, the lowest part of the pyramid of social classes is where the **Lower Class** situated. These are the skilled and unskilled artisan, farm employees, underemployed, and indigent families. Because of the given status in life, these people lack revenue or income and educational training or background. Without the proper education, some of them are jobless or have difficulty to find a job in order to make ends meet. They also lack support network that could lift them up.

How did stratification system started? Remember the lesson about the earliest form of human societies. According to the sociologists and anthropologists, in earliest societies, people shared a common social standing; there was no social class back then.

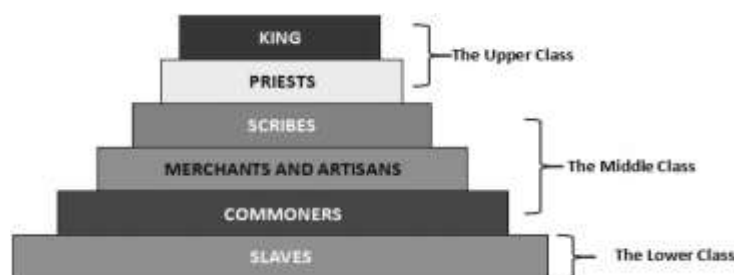


Figure 2. *Example of Stratification during Earliest Civilization*

As societies evolved and became more complex, it began to elevate some members of the society through land acquisition and social status or social entitlement. In the earliest civilization, there were kings and priests as the upper class, scribes, merchants and artisans as the middle class, and slaves as the lower class.

Characteristics of Stratification Systems

Imagine two extremely wealthy people. One of them inherited their money, acquiring it through the luck that comes with being born to parents or owners of immense amounts of property and wealth, while the other person worked for what he/she had. That person started at the bottom, and through years of hard work and strategic dealing in life was able to build a business empire of their own.

Now, which one would you say deserves the wealth? Sociologically, the interesting aspect isn't your answer to the question; it's the fact that different societies, in different times and places, have different answers because the question of what it means to deserve wealth, success, or power, is a matter of social stratification.

Let's take a look at the different characteristics of social stratification. Social stratification is:

1. Universal but variable. *Social stratification* is what we are talking about when we talk about *social inequality* and *social mobility*. Society categorizes people and ranks them in a hierarchy. Everything, from social status, prestige, to the kind of job one holds, or to the chances of living in poverty, is affected by social stratification. Stratification is **universal** but variable because it shows up in every society in the world, but how exactly it looks like, how it divides and categorizes people, and what the advantages or disadvantages are that come with that division - vary from society to society.

2. Not a matter of individual differences. People are obviously different from each other, so we might assume that stratification is just a kind of natural outcome of differences, but in reality, it is not. We know we can see the effects of social stratification on people regardless of their personal choices or traits. For example, children of wealthy families are more likely to live longer and be healthier, to attend college, and to excel in school as compared to children born into poverty. Moreover, they are more likely to be wealthy themselves when they grow up.

3. Persists across generations. Stratification serves to categorize and rank members of society across generations, resulting in different life chances. Yet generally, society allows some degree of social mobility, or changes in the position within the social hierarchy. People sometimes move upward or downward in social class, which is the basic concept of social mobility.

4. A social beliefs. A society's cultural beliefs tell us how to categorize people, and they define inequalities of a stratification system as being normal, or even fair. If people don't believe that the system is right, it won't last. Beliefs are what make systems of social stratification work and it is through these beliefs about social stratification that inform what it means to deserve wealth, success, or power.

Forms of Stratification Systems

1. Close System of Stratification

India's Caste System is probably one of the best-known forms of close system of stratification. While it is a social system of decreasing importance, it still holds in parts of rural India, and has a strong legacy across the country. The traditional caste system contains four large divisions called **Varnas**. It consists of **Brahmin**, or priests and academics in their native language, as placed at the top of the hierarchy; followed by **Khsatriya** or the rulers (kings), warriors, and administrators; then **Vaishya** or merchants and landowners; and last is the **Shudra** or the commoners, peasants, and servants.



Figure 3. *Ancient India's Caste System*

The system required **endogamy** - marriage within your own caste category. In everyday life, the caste system determines whom one could interact with, and how, with systems of social control, contact between lower and higher castes is restricted. This whole system is based on a set of strong cultural and religious beliefs that living within your own category is a moral and spiritual duty - the reason why gods are on the top of the pyramid because caste system is governed by religious beliefs of Hinduism.

2. Open System of Stratification

Class System is one of the best examples of open system of stratification and is not based solely on ascribed status at birth alone. Instead, it combines ascribed status and personal achievement or achieved status in a way that allows some social mobility. Statuses are not the same. We get different statuses in different ways and chances. Some are **ascribed statuses**, which are assigned or given by the society or group based on some fixed category, without regard to a person's abilities or performance. Examples of ascribed status are sex, family background, race, and ethnic heritage or wealth. A person did nothing to earn these statuses, nor has control over these characteristics and had no opportunity or chance to choose family, sex, and race. On the other hand, **achieved statuses** are earned by the individual. The following scenarios serve as examples.

A poor teenager becomes an actress-singer after winning in a television contest. A college graduate lands a good job because the quality of his or her performance satisfied his or her employer. With achieved statuses, one establishes which statuses he or she wants. Frequently, a person struggles and exerts more effort on others to get hold of them. Class is the system of stratification we have in Philippine society. The main difference between caste and class systems is that class systems are open, and social mobility is not legally restricted to certain people. It is possible that through hard work and perseverance, a citizen can move up the social hierarchy, and achieve a higher-class standing. Instead of ancestry, lineage, or race being the key to social division, the Philippine system of stratification has elements of **meritocracy**: a system in which social mobility is based on personal merit and individual talents. Every Filipino's dream is that anyone, no matter how poor, can "pull himself/herself up" and become upwardly class mobile through hard work and perseverance.

Social Stratification in Sociological Perspectives

1. Functionalism.

At the beginning, we may think of social stratification as merely only creating social inequality among groups of people. In some aspects of social life, it is true. But **social inequality** brought by social stratification base from wealth, prestige, and power of social groups, is indeed functional in the society according to Functionalist Theory.

Every social class has its purpose or role to play a part in the society. We can't expect the owner of a certain business empire to do a construction works; but instead, he will hire someone to do it for himself. The upper class, although they are getting richer because they have the capacity to exploit natural and man-made resources simply because they have the money. Their role in the society could create job opportunities for other social classes below them. In fact, there are jobs not requiring a college degree. In this sense, those who are not able to finish their studies

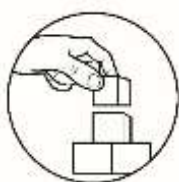
can still be hired. Those with college degree can be employed with a higher paid salary and good position in a company.

2. Conflict Theory.

This sociological perspective is the opposite of the latter. Karl Marx viewed social stratification as creation of inequality between the rich and the poor, or the powerful versus the powerless. Let's say for example: The *bourgeois capitalists* owning high-producing businesses or factories and hire people who work for them. They can enjoy the luxury of life because they earn billions of money. However, *proletariats* are the working class earned skimpy wages and experiencing isolation to the society. The very essence of life is to enjoy it with loved ones. However, working class did not experience this joy because they are isolated to do the labor for long hours each day to earn money at the end of the month. Marx argued that proletariats were oppressed by the money-hungry bourgeois.

3. Symbolic Interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism views social stratification on a micro level where individuals affect others whom they have interacted because of their social class status. In most societies, people can only interact only to those with the same social class status. For an instance, it is rare for a royal prince or princess to marry a commoner because the commoner doesn't have the same class status as to royal prince or princess. But now, there are royal marriages already break this tradition.



What's More

Caste System versus Class System

The caste system in ancient India and the class system in the modern-day Philippines both created an unequal balance of power in their respective society. Specific qualities or traits separate people into groups, which results in certain groups having more power than others. However, there are some major differences between the caste system and class system. Identify three (3) major differences and similarities between the caste system in ancient India and the class system in modern-day Philippine society. Fill in these differences and similarities in the Venn diagram below. Afterwards, explain on the space provided these differences and similarities in order to fully understand stratification system.